

photocopied all documentation and set off to do battle with the managing director of the bank; it was so blatantly ridiculous. Over dinner that evening Milo was quite shattered. A typical British bank manager of those complacent days could not see there was any problem. All the banks were the same. But could they not gain a competitive advantage by doing better? Milo said it was like trying to murder a quilt.

We got through the mission, but it was a really long haul. The funny thing was that some very interesting entomological data were obtained. The untidy back garden of the hotel abutted a ravine with a bit of forest. One afternoon I discovered the caterpillars of the Forest Grizzled Skipper *Spialia ploetzi* on *Triumfetta* (Tiliaceae), a new host-plant record. Like most skippers, the larvae live in little shelters made by folding the leaves. While I was examining one of these shelters a large sphecid wasp suddenly landed on the leaf, bit a slit, and extracted the larva. What was going on? Predation once removed, that's what. The leaf was folded in such a way that the almost white underside was very visible. The wasp was checking all white leaves that could be seen from above and would do so till there would be diminishing returns. Then it would stumble on another useful search pattern. But at the moment it had become a temporary specialised predator of the skipper larva (for details see this Journal, Larsen, 1981. 93:54-55).

I also managed to do detailed observation on the dragonfly *Orthetrum austeni* during a 24-hour flight delay on the unlamented Caledonian Airlines. It is now clear that this is a specialised predator of butterflies and day flying moths. Those observations were published (Larsen 1981, *Notulae Odonatologica* 1:130-133); the late Denis Owen had many similar observations from Sierra Leone.

We left Lagos five hours later than our 24-hour delay. We tried to land in Accra, but weather was still poor, and we finally ended up in Kano, being stuck for another five hours while the captain was trying to bribe some petrol out of the ground staff – he seemed to have 100,000 quid in travellers' cheques. The few passengers watched all the films and drank all the booze and eventually we reached London.

But it is nice that, even under the worst circumstances, butterflies will be available for useful study!– TORBEN B. LARSEN, Bangladesh, World Bank, 1818 H. Street N. W., Washington D.C., 20433, USA (Email: Torbenlarsen@compuserve.com).

Migration of Nymphalid butterflies in southern Laos, Indo-China (Lep.: Nymphalinae: Danainae)

On the afternoon of 1 of June 1999, I arrived at Savannakhet, Laos, a small frontier provincial town on the east bank of the Mekong river. Walking in mid-afternoon from the hotel along dusty streets towards the river, I became aware of the presence of a steady stream of large orange-coloured *Vindula*

butterflies, apparently all males, heading approximately south. As I neared the Mekong, individuals were more numerous and on the bank it was clear that a major migration was in progress. Between the river and the road was a bank, steep in places, covered in vegetation – mainly grass but with some flowers.

On the eastern side of the road were single and double storey buildings and gardens. Buildings impeded progress of individual butterflies, which flew up and over, or around them. On the road and riverbank, where there was nothing substantial to interrupt progress, butterflies flew fast and directly either singly, or in groups of two to four, about 0.5 to 2.5 metres above the ground. It was also clear that although individual butterflies were almost without exception large and fundamentally orange-brown, there were several species involved. The bulk of specimens were males of a *Vindula* species (probably *V. erota* Fabricius), but there were also several paler *Vindula* females and a *Cirrochroa* species (*C. tyche* Felder?). Also present were what I first took to be female *Argyrius hyperbius* Linnaeus, but there were no males and it was found on close inspection that these were *Danaus chrysippus* Linnaeus, many of which were also feeding at flowers on the river bank. It should be admitted that none were captured and that identification is based only on the author's imperfect knowledge of the region's butterflies.

Choosing the river bank, because there were no butterflies here flying against the general direction of movement or over the water, and because this afforded a good vantage point, total numbers of migrating butterflies passing a point during timed minutes were determined using a wristwatch stopwatch facility. Numbers of migrating individuals in 10 timed minutes in a half-hour period were 88, 111, 77, 131, 62, 128, 97, 208, 158 and 110 (average of 117 per minute). These data were collected between 1530 and 1630 hrs, with general observations made between 1515 hrs and 1730 hrs. Although this was only a section of the "stream", it was impractical to count butterflies over a wider area (other than, possibly, the road) due to differences in flight height above the river and the buildings. The section chosen was approximately 20m wide and represented probably 20% of the total width of the main migration, with density overall appearing more-or-less constant. Movement in the area where progress was interrupted by the buildings was difficult to assess, but appeared less dense. Movement was in a southerly direction. On the periphery of this broad band, butterflies flew in the same direction through the streets of the town, but individuals were few and it was not so obvious that they were part of a migration.

There were several other butterfly species feeding at flowers on the bank, but apparently not involved in the migration. These included *Eurema hecabe* Linnaeus, and *Acraea issoria* Hübner. I left Savannakhet for Vientianne early the following morning and have no idea for how long movement continued, not for how long it had been in progress prior to my arrival in Savannakhet. – W. JOHN TENNENT, 38 Colin McLean Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 2RY (E-mail: jt@storment.freeserve.co.uk).